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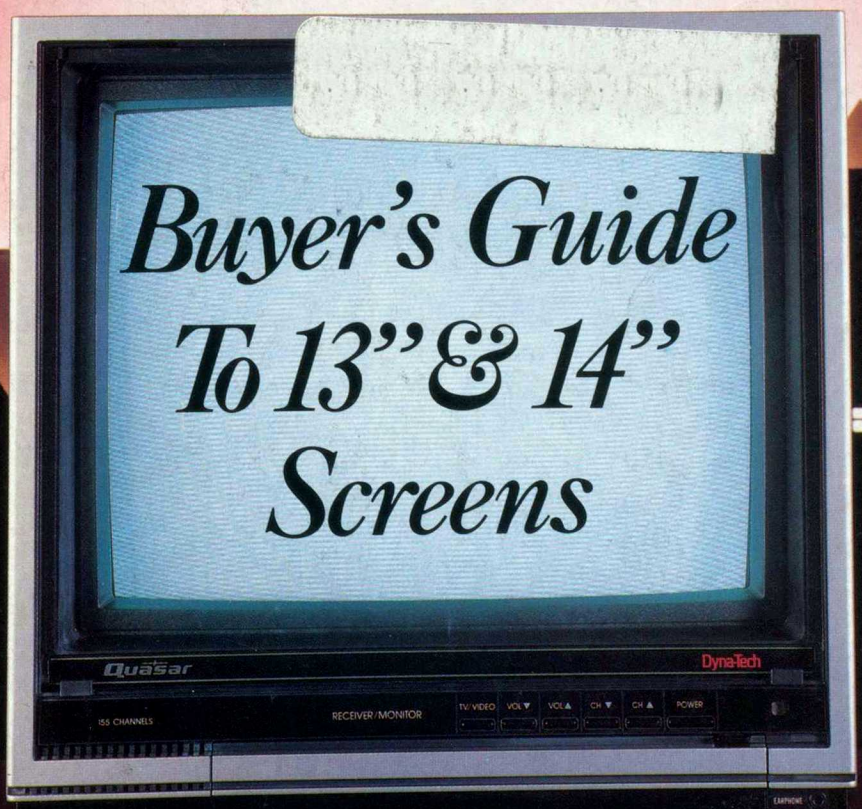
The #1 Magazine of Home Video

TVs For Tight Spaces



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Rescuing An Epic's Missing 18 Minutes

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Oldies You'll Never Outgrow

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Yamaha 25" Monitor/Receiver

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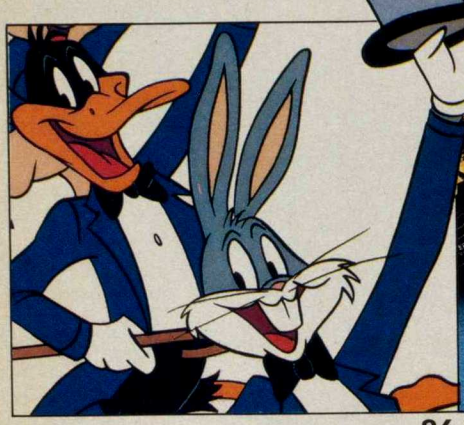

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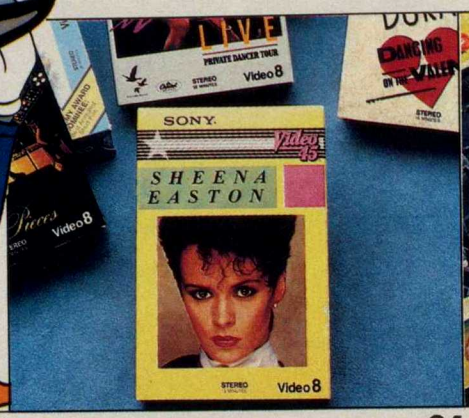

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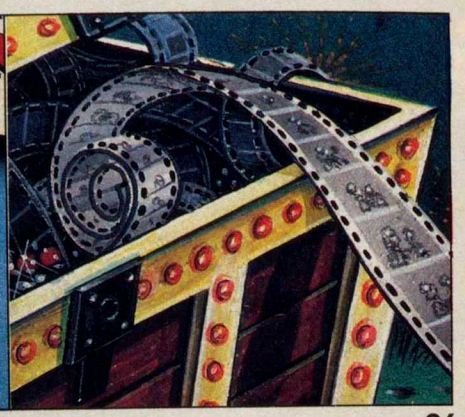

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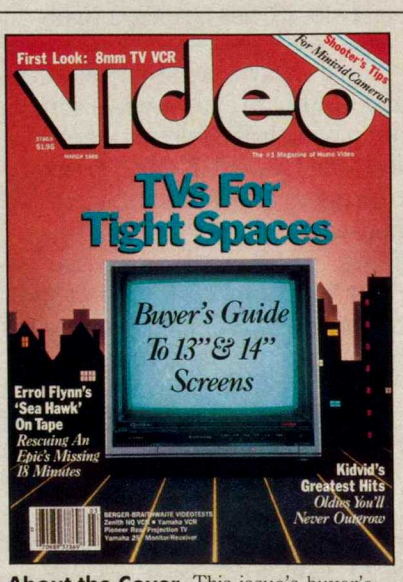

About the Cover. This issue's buyer's guide is on the forgotten screen size, 13- and 14-inch: a boon to city dwellers. Cover photo by Vittorio Sartor.

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Random Access

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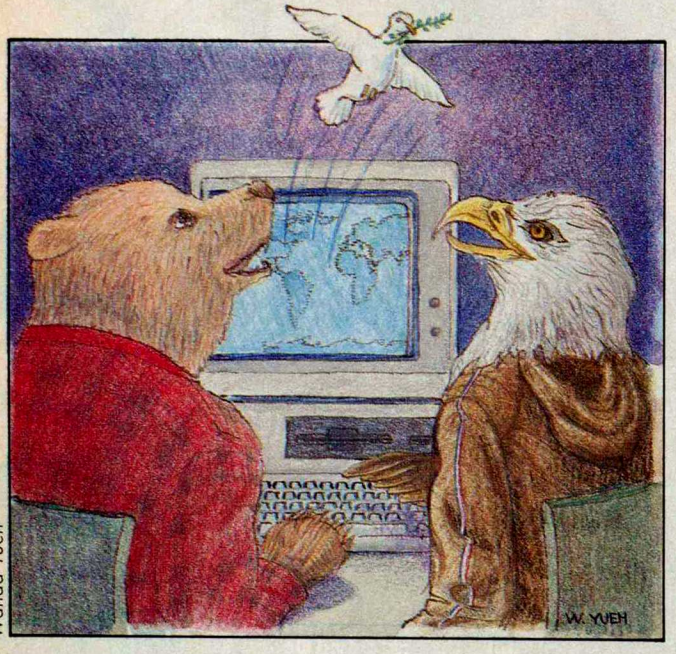


Wanda Yueh

No-Win War Games

"No," says the black screen that follows the nuclear war in Chris Crawford's *Balance of Power*, "there is no animated display of mushroom clouds and bodies flying through the air. We do not reward failure." So ends this geopolitical simulation—a war game that plays more like a peace game.

Balance of Power (Mindscape, Macintosh, $49.95) is a strategy game based, not on conquest, like *Risk*, but on saving or improving a nation's prestige in the face of complex political events that may or may not lead to superpower crises and a nuclear confrontation. By siding with pro- or anti-government forces in unstable nations, players assume the role of either the U.S. or the Soviet Union and play against each other or the computer for eight (game time) years.

Nothing short of actual experience with this program can describe *Balance*'s complexity. Based on the present state of the world, current levels of political stability, alliances, economic conditions, and recent events, the game briefs its players on the status of any nation in the world. Armed with this data, players choose whether to back Danny Ortega's regime in Nicaragua or send aid to the contras, and make other similar decisions.

If drastic actions are taken—say 5000 marines are sent into Afghanistan to challenge the Soviet regime—the situation escalates into crisis. The Russians, naturally, demand a U.S. military pull-out. If you, as the American President, stand firm the tension builds until the "def-con" (nuclear defense condition) goes to level one (most dangerous), and a nuclear war explodes.

It will be interesting to see how this game ages. Since the play begins in 1986, Crawford and his publishers should be safe for a year, unless, of course, the Middle East goes. They should consider issuing an annual update so it does not become inaccurate and obsolete.

—Timothy Onosko

Personal Powerhouse

You can't be too paranoid when your home is in Hell's Kitchen on the west side of midtown Manhattan. With a couple of thousand dollars worth of electronics and software on hand—much of it on loan for review—I was relieved to have an X-10 Powerhouse added to the list. This $150 timer/controller by X-10, Inc. switches on lights, radios, and other appliances to give the impression of life.

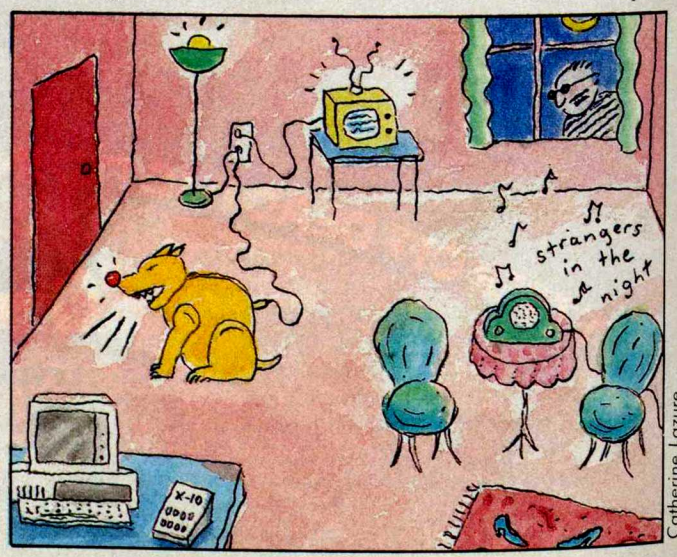
The beauty of the X-10, compared to conventional wall socket timers, is that it can be programmed to control dozens of appliances using a Commodore 64, an Apple II series computer, or an IBM PC. The box, in this case white, sends signals through the house wiring to outlet modules which control the flow of electricity to the lamp, the TV, and the like.

Programming the X-10 is as simple as connecting a plug to an outlet. Using a joystick or a keyboard, you install appliance icons in the image of a split-level seven room ranch house. Switch to the operating mode and you can select on and off times for up to 128 different events a week.

Once the X-10 is programmed, it can be disconnected from the computer and moved around the house. A 9-volt battery keeps the memory intact for up to 100 hours. Modules, which can be purchased from Radio Shack or Sears for about $17 each, can be attached to wall switches for overhead or outdoor lights. Thermostat controllers are also available.

Not that the X-10 is without fault. Since it connects through the RS-232 port, you'll need a super serial card and an extended 80 column card if you have an Apple IIe. It doesn't handle fluorescent lights and won't dim lights with dimmers already built-in. Since my hours are anything but consistent, having the radio blare funk rap while napping doesn't lessen my paranoia either.

—Ben Templin



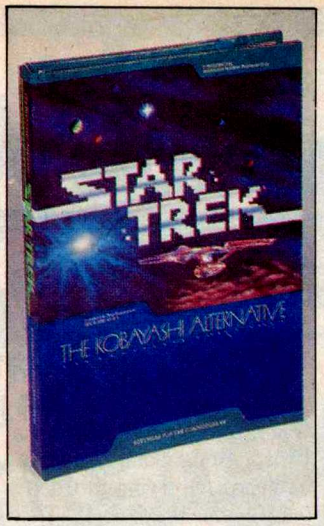
Catherine Lazure

STAR TREK 3.5: The Search for Sulu

In *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan,* Lt. Saavik failed the dreaded Kobayashi Maru scenario, a test of character to evaluate leadership potential. Only one cadet in Starfleet history, a James T. Kirk, had ever beaten this "no-win" situation. However, three cadets in a row recently beat the simulation and Starfleet decided to supplement the test with a new scenario.

The Kobayashi Alternative, (Simon & Schuster, IBM PC, 64K Apple II, Commodore 64, $39.95), places you in the space boots of Admiral Kirk of the USS Enterprise. The mission: find the exploration ship USS Heinlein, under command of Captain Sulu, last known to be under attack by alien ships in the remote Trianguli sector.

Such a tricky rescue mission requires a special crew. All the familiar characters heed your call to boldly go where no PC has gone before. The program boasts a



distinctive "personality database," which makes the characters respond to events and commands like their movie counterparts. Success depends in large part on tapping the talents and training of the crew.

The program uses a special windowing scheme to show the status of the Enterprise, the crew's response to your orders and actions, computer data, and a running narrative of events.

While the designers were clever enough to make the program recognize standard Star Trek dialogue, the parser still needs improvement. Too often, your intentions do not translate into action because the program fails to recognize what even Spock would find to be perfectly logical commands.

Also, movement in space and on planets should be faster. Just because the Enterprise takes 10 game minutes to cross the Trianguli sector should not mean you have to stare at a monitor screen for 10 real minutes.

The Kobayashi Alternative is like the first Star Trek movie—the high points are separated by lulls and voids. The game certainly challenges your reasoning powers and Star Trek fans will probably jump at the opportunity to play Adm. Kirk. *The Kobayashi Alternative* needs some fine tuning, but is a good first effort.

—Russ Lockwood

The VCR Connection

You may have thought it was only for watching movies at home, but the VCR is gaining popularity as a storage device for computers. Alpha Micro, a Santa Ana, Calif. computer company, has developed an interface that translates the computer's digital language into an analog form so it can be stored on VHS and Beta cassettes.

The Videotrax system is used by businesses to backup hard disks. Computer data can often be lost so a spare copy on videotape means easy and cheap insurance against data loss. Because of its timer, the VCR can also record information unattended. The system consists of a circuit board to insert into IBM PCs and compatibles, software, and a VCR.

Each cassette stores up to 80 megabytes of information, which would take roughly 960 single-density disks.

Videotrax runs $1595 with a VCR and $795 without.

Once Upon A Pan

Herbie Hancock likes to hang out with his computer. The noted keyboard wizard subscribes to the Pan Network, a bulletin board for musicians, and has been known to go on-line during the wee hours. If you've never met Hancock, and perhaps have a burning desire to know what synth he's been programming lately, just leave a message for him in Pan's E-mail box. He just might respond.

"Herbie usually calls early in the morning," says the Network's executive director Perry Leopold. "He's really into keeping up with what's happening in the synth area. He's on-line quite a bit. Herbie's open, but not as open as Barry."

We're talking Barry Manilow now. Leopold might be hyping when he says "a booking agent sent Barry a song idea in E-mail recently. He replied, and they've been going back and forth." Then again he might not. Fact is, Manilow was a guest speaker at a Pan seminar in December that focused on songwriting, arranging, and record production. "He's very gracious," Leopold adds.

Conferencing is just one aspect of the network, which claims 800 members, from *Billboard* magazine to the Anticlub in Los Angeles. Punch in "Backstage Pass" on the Main Menu and a sub-menu with all sorts of goodies appears. For a new band seeking contacts in college radio and the club scene, several of the databases found in this section are worth the price of admission, which is $150. On-line cost are $12 per hour at night and $24 during the day at 300 or 1200 baud. The listing includes 750 record stores and stations, and more than 2000 clubs. With Pan's help, a group can book a concert without an agent.

"College radio is finding a niche on the network," Leopold boasts, adding that "the synth area is growing nicely. They all have computers, which helps." To subscribe to Pan, call 215-489-4640 and explain what you do in the music business. "We take people's word," says Leopold. Barry is waiting.

—Steve Bloom

BEST SELLERS/HOME

1. **Print Shop Graphics Library 3.** AP, C64, AT. Broderbund
2. **Newsroom.** AP, IBM, C64. Springboard.
3. **Print Shop Companion.** AP. Broderbund.
4. **Print Shop.** AP, C64, AT. Broderbund.
5. **Bank Street Writer.** AP, APc, IBM, C64, AT. Broderbund.
6. **Dollars & Sense.** AP, APc, IB, MAC, TIP. Monogram.
7. **Clip Art Vol. 1 for Newsroom.** AP, IBM, C64. Springboard.
8. **Managing Your Money.** APc, APe, IBM. MECA.
9. **Print Shop Graphics Library 2.** AP, C64, AT. Broderbund
10. **Print Shop Graphics Library 1.** AP, C64, AT. Broderbund.

BEST SELLERS/RECREATION

1. **Gato.** AP, IBM, MAC, PCjr. Spectrum Holobyte.
2. **Microsoft Flight Simulator.** IBM, PCjr. Microsoft.
3. **Jet.** IBM, C64. Sublogic.
4. **Flight Simulator II.** AP, C64, AT, DG. Sublogic.
5. **Sargon III.** AP, IBM, MAC, C64, AT. Hayden Software.
6. **Winter Games.** AP, MAC, C64. Epyx.
7. **Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy.** AP, IBM, MAC, C64, AT. Infocom.
8. **F-15 Strike Eagle.** AP, IBM, C64, AT. Microprose.
9. **Star Trek: The Kobayashi Alternative.** AP, IBM, C64. Simon & Schuster.
10. **Ultima IV.** AP, C64. Origin Systems.

LEGEND: AP = Apple, APc = Apple IIc, APe = Apple IIe, AT = Atari, C64 = Commodore 64, COM = Commodore Pet/CBM, CP/M = 5¼" and 8" formats, DEC = DEC Rainbow, DG = Data General, EPS = Epson QX-10, IBM = IBM-PC, MAC = Apple Macintosh, PCjr = IBM PCjr, TIP = Texas Instruments Professional, TRS = TRS-80, VIC = Commodore Vic-20, VTR = Victor 9000, WNG = Wang Personal Computer, ZEN = Zenith 100.

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